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The Church Must Come To Order

—Mark W. White

Paul's letters in the New Testament are filled with encouragements, thanksgivings, warnings, teachings, corrections, reproofs— and commendations. The Colossian epistle is a case in point. After laying down in chapter one the basic tenets supporting the Christian's hope, emphasizing the mystery revealed in and through Jesus Christ, Paul asserts the dangers of false doctrines faced by the brethren. Delivering a sharp blow to the Gnostic thinkers of his day, he said *"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"* are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3). There is simply no other source for true wisdom and knowledge apart from Christ. Colossians were told to beware of those who pretended to be wise through manmade worship and mistreatment of their bodies, things which may have appeared wise and spiritual, yet were of no real value against the flesh (Col. 2:23). Apparently, the Colossians were handling their challenges to true faith and wisdom rather well. Paul commended them for this. In fact, he specifically rejoiced to *"see your good order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ"* (Col. 2:5).

That word, *"order"* (*"discipline"*, NASB) captivates our attention. The Greek term from which it comes into English is used only a few times in the New Testament. Once, it is found concerning Zachariah's fixed priestly duties (Lk. 1:9). Several times it is used to explain the connection of Christ's priesthood with that of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:10; 7:11). Two other uses are here in the book of Colossians and once in I Corinthians 14:40.

The word has many derivatives but they all have similar meanings. The root meaning of *"order"* is that of precision of arrangement, marked by discipline somewhat like the military use of *"order"*. Its verb forms demand attention to what is commanded or ordained (to arrange, to appoint, to ordain, to prescribe, to give order; Thayer).

This is exactly Paul's meaning when he says to the Corinthians, *"And the rest I will set in order when I come"* (I Cor. 11:34, KJV). Or, *"the remaining matters I will arrange when I come"* (NASB).

Doubtless, the order Paul heard about in Colossae was very important, especially since he listed it beside their steadfastness in their faith. It should also be important to churches of the Lord today. Paul does not say exactly what the Colossians were orderly about, but the context is broad enough to include the whole of their service to God. For certain, the Colossians (and the Laodiceans, despite their later reputation) were not exhibiting the same disorder and confusion which could be observed at Corinth, for example. The Corinthian church blatantly violated the decorum of decency and order (I Cor. 14:40). Paul did not commend them for this but rather corrected them. Despite their possession of an abundance of miraculous gifts, the church was disorderly in the exercise of those otherwise edifying aids. They used poor judgment and selfishly ate the Lord's Supper without due consideration of poorer brethren who had nothing to eat, turning the Lord's Supper into a common meal for those without the wherewithal to provide their own feast. Poorer brethren went hungry, so to speak, as the Lord's Supper turned into a selfish and carnal display. They lacked order. Significantly, the church was not being edified and visitors were unimpressed by what they saw and heard (14:23). Thankfully, the disorder at Corinth had not yet affected the Colossian church across the Aegean Sea. In striking contrast, they were orderly and steadfast in their faith (Col. 2:5).

We need to study carefully the lessons of I Corinthians 11-14. *"God is not a God of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."* (14:33, NASB). The church must always be a place of order, so that edification and worship can occur.

Honesty Filters

Jacob Hudgins

Jesus encourages honesty in His disciples. In Jesus' time, the prevailing practice is to use oaths to bolster credibility (I swear by the temple!) and occasionally to lie freely (I swore by the altar, not the gift on the altar, so I don't have to keep it!) So He teaches His disciples not to take oaths at all. "Let what you say be simply, 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" ([Matt 5:37](#)). Followers of Jesus must develop a reputation for honesty so that our "yes" or "no" will be believed.

This means we will need to learn different ways to talk. Honesty must become so important to us that we consistently say only things that are true. I like to think of this as an honesty filter—a system that carefully guards our speech so that only honest words come out.

How do we develop an honesty filter?

1. Start with a commitment

We must begin with the personal conviction that honesty is God's will for us. Telling the truth is more important than other benefits lying might bring. When I first began to devote serious attention to improving my honesty, I was shocked at how much lying, exaggeration, and innuendo is part of our regular conversations (even among Christians). I knew that I wanted to be different, even if that meant being less fun to talk to. So I made a commitment: "I won't knowingly say anything untrue."

2. Slow down and choose words carefully

James warns us: "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger" ([James 1:19](#)). It's OK to take our time. Certain words imply more than we intend—or come closer to lines of impropriety—or make improper suggestions about others. Even tone of voice can convey meaning. The goal in our word choice is always accuracy. I find that the slower I speak, the more quickly I can correct inaccuracies and offer more precise wording. If we lack motivation, it helps to remember times when we've had to clean up the mess we have caused from speaking too quickly and saying things that are untrue.

3. Know your weaknesses

Where are your weaknesses? Peter's mouth gets him into trouble because he is impulsive and speaks quickly. For some of us, people-pleasing means that we are tempted to compromise truth to impress others. We all like to look good. We can all use money. Sometimes when others gossip, we are strongly tempted to share things that are inappropriate or untrue. It is likely that we will find a correlation between our spiritual weaknesses and our honesty problems. When these weaknesses are in play, we must be on our guard. Strong temptations often make us compromise first in our honesty.

4. Scan your speech

An honesty filter will require that we listen carefully to what we are saying as we are saying it. Do we mean what we are saying? God blesses the one who "speaks truth in his heart" ([Psalm 15:2](#)), which means an inner honesty that comes out in speech. How do our words sound to others? Are we certain of these details? Are these characterizations fair? Do we really know these things or just suspect them? Preaching weekly has taught me that I can listen to myself differently when I know that I am "on the record," where Christians will be carefully listening to my word choice. I am always scanning my speech to see how others (and God) will hear what I am saying. But are we ever truly "off the record" with regard to honesty?

5. Correct mistakes

We will slip up. Honesty filters hinge on our willingness to correct mistakes that we make, even small inaccuracies. There are judgment calls here. Some mistakes will be inadvertent or harmless, while others will be serious deceptions. I encourage correcting even unintentional inaccuracies. It is great practice for thinking carefully about my "yes" or "no." By "correcting mistakes," I mean telling the person we initially lied to that what we said was incorrect or

deceptive. The goal here is to know our own hearts and admit when there was something sinister behind our choices. The blessing is that the embarrassment of correcting such mistakes will reinforce our need for a filter.

Honesty filters require patience to develop as we learn a new pattern for something we have done for a long time. It gets easier. Ask God to bless you as you pursue his will for your honesty.